

The Daily Enterprise.

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BEAUMONT, TEXAS, FRIDAY, JANUARY 13 1899.

NO 237

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AN AWFUL HOLACAUST.

W. H. Denny of LaBelle Roasted to Death in the Telegraph Hotel.

The Telegraph hotel, Beaumont's oldest hostelry, was destroyed by fire between 2 and 3 o'clock this morning, and one man perished in the flames, although it was first thought that all the occupants had escaped.

The fire started about 2 a. m., and the flames had made such headway before being discovered that there was no chance to save the building, and there were also several other narrow escapes. The guests lost all their belongings and the furniture was a total loss.

The origin of the fire is unknown and was discovered by Mrs. H. V. Gregory, who was sitting up with her sister, Mrs. Elder, who conducted the hotel and who was ill. Mrs. Gregory chanced to open the door of the room which opened into the hall and smelled clothing burning. Mrs. Gregory told her sister that she believed the hotel was on fire, and on making an examination the back part of the parlor was found in flames. The fire made rapid headway, and though the fire department responded promptly, the whole building was ablaze when they turned the water on.

Five streams were brought to play on the building but it was found necessary to put a great deal of water on the adjoining buildings, especially on the opposite side of the street, where the building used upstairs as a tabernacle by the Jewish congregation and downstairs by Elisha, the tailor, and Sewarner, the jeweler, caught fire from the heat of the burning hotel.

Fortunately the night was damp and there was no wind. The work of the fire department was perfect; so excellent was the work in this respect that the buildings which stood within a few feet of the hotel, escaped with a slight scorching. It is a wonder that more of the guests were not burned to death.

It was thought that a man and wife had also perished in the flames, but after a fairly careful examination of the ruins Chief Ed Eastham said he thought no others perished.

About 10 o'clock, however, negro boys, while digging around in the ruins found a skull in under some debris and called the attention of J. J. Shields who was directing the search and after some little labor an awful spectacle was presented to the gaze of the curious throng. Lying on his face with the skull burned bare and the flesh literally roasted was a man who, it is thought, was W. H. Denny of LaBelle. C. H. Cheshire, who was familiar with the hotel said that it was evidently room No. 20 and an examination of the hotel register showed that W. H. Denny of LaBelle had occupied that room.

After Judge Rigsby arrived the body was turned over and the sight was yet more gruesome. One foot was burned off and the other foot was burned to a crisp. The arms were burned until the bones and muscles were plainly visible, the finger tips were burned off and the body was roasted brown. A closer examination of the skull revealed that the right side had been crushed by a heavy blow and congealed and clotted blood which were found on the inside led to the suspicion that the man had been murdered and the building afterward set on fire to conceal the crime.

Dr. Price, who examined the skull, said that the head had

cracked the skull and discredited the theory that the man had been murdered.

The man evidently was dressed and was lying on his right arm and flat on his face and it does not seem possible that he could have been struck by the falling roof as the ceiling which covered him was almost intact and would probably have pinned him down so that with his skull crushed he could not have turned over on his face.

Mr. Denny was a rice farmer at LaBelle, was a customer of J. J. Solinsky, and left his grip at the grocery last night. He had intended to go to Crowley this morning and was to call for his grip this morning but did not do so.

Joe Solinsky saw Denny going toward the Telegraph house about 8 o'clock last night and Denny asked if there was anything going on in town and being told that there was not went on toward hotel; that was the last Mr. Solinsky saw of him.

The unfortunate man was about fifty years old and leaves a family who were notified this morning.

Some of the other occupants of the hotel had narrow escapes. E. L. Powell of Laurel occupied room No. 23 on the second floor. When he awakened his room was filled with smoke and he found his escape by the stairway was cut off and, being unable to raise the window, broke the sash with his fist and jumped to the ground. His hand was injured by breaking the sash, but escaped without other injury. Mr. Powell is a brother of Dr. C. N. Powell, well known in this city and was on his way to Philadelphia to attend college. He lost his valise containing \$200 in greenbacks which he had pushed under his bed. Mr. Powell said that a lady and gentleman who occupied room No. 24 were screaming for help in a frantic manner and he feared they were lost as he did not see them escape.

Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Harris and two children occupied room No. 18 on the first floor. They dressed and thereby had a narrow escape. Mr. Harris had his beard singed and Mrs. Harris's hair was also badly singed. Mr. Harris formerly lived at Sabine Pass and is now employed as stenographer by the Wilson Hardware company. Mr. and Mrs. Harris lost all of their valuables and clothing except their everyday wearing apparel.

Mrs. L. M. Hill, the Palace milliner, also had a very narrow escape. She was awakened and tried to escape by the stairway and was almost suffocated. She turned back, closed the door and escaped over the gallery, being assisted down by some gentlemen who held a colored man on their shoulders. This man's fingers were burned by the heat. Mayer Nusbaum was one of the gentlemen who helped rescue her. Mrs. Hill's clothing was all destroyed with the exception of a skirt which happened to fall on her arm as she came back to her room. Among her valuables was the manuscript of a book which represents several years of labor. Mrs. Hill is an authoress and writes over the signature of "Lia May."

Captain W. O. Loving was in the hotel and heard the alarm. He dressed leisurely, thinking the fire was somewhere in the neighborhood, but when he opened the door he found escape by the stairs cut off and he too made his exit by the window.

The Telegraph was the oldest hotel building standing in Beaumont. E. L. Wilson bought the house that stands on the south side of where the hotel stood when he was telegraph operator in this city. That was in the seventies. He built the hotel and it has been added to several times. Mr. C. T. Heisig, the insurance man, informs us that his companies carried policies on the house amounting to \$1000 and on the furniture in the sum of \$500. About \$5 in silver, a pocket knife and a piece of tobacco were found near the person of the unfortunate victim of the flames.

The coroner had not concluded the inquest at this writing.

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